

Washington State Patrol

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



Office of the State Fire Marshal
State Fire Marshal Mary Corso

Home for the Holidays

2003 SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON MEDIA KIT

December 12, 2003

Washington State Patrol

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



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Office of the State Fire Marshal **State Fire Marshal Mary Corso**

To: Media Representatives

With the holiday season here, the Washington State Patrol, Office of the State Fire Marshal encourages all Washington state citizens to enjoy this time of year safely. Too often, the holidays are marred by preventable injuries and/or the loss of a loved one. By following the suggestions outlined in the following pages, you can increase your likelihood for a safe, happy and healthy holiday season.

We hope this information is useful to you, and will help raise awareness of the need to be careful and responsible while celebrating during the holidays.

If you require additional information or an interview source, you may contact:

Mary Corso, State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0493

-or-

Anjela Foster, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0493.

Thanks for you help in making this holiday season a happy and healthy one for all!

Sincerely,
CHIEF RONAL W. SERPAS

Mary L. Corso
State Fire Marshal

MLC:atf

Washington State Patrol Media Release

Chief Ronal W. Serpas



Office of the State Fire Marshal State Fire Marshal Mary Corso

Captain Glenn Cramer
Government and Media Relations
(360) 753-5299 – office
(360) 753-5469 – fax
<http://www.wa.gov/wsp/wsphome.htmff>

Date: December 12, 2003
For Immediate Release
Contact: Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal Anjela Foster
(360) 753-0493

Home for the Holidays Christmas Trees and Fire Safety

Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced today that five people lost their lives in home fires over the Thanksgiving Holiday weekend. Please take precautions to keep your family and guests safe during the remaining holiday season.

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso, and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals, reminds you that Christmas trees, whether fresh or artificial, should be protected from fire hazards. The following safety tips can help you to protect your Christmas tree from fire.

When using a fresh cut tree, start by selecting the freshest-looking tree available. To test for freshness, gently grasp a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pull it toward you. Very few needles should come off in your hand. Shake or bounce the tree on its stump. You should not see an excessive amount of green needles fall to the ground. Some loss of interior brown needles is normal.

Store the tree in water if not setting up right away and protect it from the sun and wind. Make a fresh cut off the bottom of the trunk one half inch from the bottom just before putting in the stand. ***Don't add anything to the tree's water.*** Research has shown that plain tap water is by far the best. Some commercial additives and home concoctions can actually be detrimental to a tree's moisture retention and increase needle loss. Keep the tree's stand full of water at all times, checking the water level daily. The stand you use should hold at least one quart of water for every inch diameter of the trunk after the tree is in the stand. The stand should also be sturdy and designed not to tip over. Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house, garage, or against the house.

Protect your tree from fire hazards—whether your tree is real or artificial. Place the Christmas tree well away from heat registers, space heaters, fire places, wood stoves, televisions, computer monitors and other heat sources. These will speed up evaporation and moisture loss of the tree. When decorating Christmas trees, always use safe tree lights. (Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.) Larger tree lights should also have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used. Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep. **Never** use lit candles to decorate a tree. When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.

Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights. Store matches and lighters up high, out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.

Know what to do in Case of Fire--Residential fire sprinklers offer the best protection to ensure escape from the fire. Consider installing them in your home. Install smoke detectors **on** every level of your home and outside sleeping areas. Make and practice a home escape plan with your family. Be sure to have two ways out of every room. Decide on a designated meeting place outside. Hold a fire drill and practice your plan annually. Once outside the home, go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. **Crawl Low in Smoke.** – If you are trapped in smoke, get down on your hands and knees and crawl to the nearest safe way out. Smoke and toxic fumes rise, so cleaner air is near the floor. **Stop, Drop and Roll** -- If your clothes catch on fire, do not run, stop where you are, drop to the ground, and roll over and over to smother the flames

For additional fire safety tips visit the Washington State Patrol – Office of the State Fire Marshal web page at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/firemars.htm> or contact your local fire department.

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State Fire Marshal Mary Corso

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Date: December 12, 2003
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Home for the Holidays Holiday Cooking Safety Tips

Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced today that the winter holidays are a time for celebration and that means more cooking, and a higher risk of fire. The kitchen is the leading area in the home where fires occurs.

Last year, cooking fires resulted in 4 fire deaths and more than \$4.5 million in property and content loss, or 11% of the total loss in residential fires.

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso, and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals reminds you of the following fire safety tips to help keep your family and guests safe during the holidays:

1. To Prevent a Cooking Fire in Your Kitchen:

- Never leave cooking unattended.
- Wear short or close fitting sleeves. Loose clothing can catch fire.
- Watch children closely, when old enough teach children to cook safety.
- Clean cooking surfaces to prevent food and grease build-up.
- Keep curtains, towels, pot holders and other flammable items away from stove surfaces.
- Turn pan handles inward to prevent food spills.
- Don't Overload Electrical Outlets. You might cause an electrical fire by plugging too many appliances into the same outlet.
- Replace any cracked or frayed cords.

2. To Put Out a Cooking Fire in Your Kitchen

- Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen. Make sure you have a multi-purpose, ABC rated extinguisher.
- Slide a pan lid over flames to smother a grease or oil fire, then turn off the heat and leave the lid in place until the pan cools. Never carry the pan outside.
- If an extinguisher is not available, extinguish other food fires with baking soda. Never use water or flour on cooking fires.
- Keep the oven door shut and turn off the heat to smother an oven or broiler fire.

- Keep a working smoke detector in your home and test it monthly.
- Report all fires to your local fire department.

3. Burn Injuries

- **If clothing catches on fire, “Stop, Drop and Roll”** – Do not run, this only fans the flames. Stop where you are, drop to the ground and roll over and over to smother the flames. Cover your face with your hands to protect it, as well as to shield your throat and lungs from burns. If someone else’s clothes are on fire, push them to the ground and roll them over and over; or smother the flames with a blanket, a rug or a coat.
- **Cool a burn with running water.**
 - If someone gets burned, run cool water over the burn for 5 to 10 minutes. This will prevent continued burning and relieve some of the pain.
 - If the burn is blistered, see a doctor as soon as possible. Burns may be worse than they seem at first.
 - If the burn is charred, involves the face, or is larger than 5% of the body, call 911 for an emergency response.

For additional fire safety tips visit the Washington State Patrol – Office of the State Fire Marshal web page at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/firemars.htm> or contact your local fire department.

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Home for the Holidays Heating Safety TIPS

Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced today that the Office of the State Fire Marshal advises both fixed and portable heating devices require careful attention.

Space heaters are a leading cause of home fires during December, January and February – but such disasters can be prevented with a few simple precautions.

Last year, home heating devices caused four fire deaths in Washington State. Home heating is among the leading causes of home fires nationally and in Washington State.

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso states “Many of these fires occurred because the devices weren’t cleaned regularly, were placed or installed too close to combustible materials, or were improperly fueled. When used improperly, gas-fueled, kerosene-fueled, or electric space heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces can all lead to fires. As winter approaches, simple steps can prevent a tragedy in your home.”

The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals reminds you of the following:

To prevent fires, keep furnishings and other ***combustible materials 36 inches from all heating sources***. A heating source too close to combustibles is the leading cause of fires due to home heating. Store matches and other fire starting appliances out of the reach of children. Fires started by children often have tragic results.

Proper maintenance and an annual inspection of heat pumps, furnaces, space heaters, wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connections by qualified specialists can prevent fires and save lives. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for installation, venting, fueling, maintenance and repair. Review the owner's manual to make sure you remember the operating and safety features.

When using portable heaters, do not place them where it is possible for small children or pets to fall against them or to receive a contact burn. Avoid the use of extension cords with electric heaters. Always turn off space heaters before leaving the room or going to bed.

When taking a gas fueled heater out of storage in the fall, install batteries and inspect the shut off mechanism and wick for proper operation. Fill the tank with fresh fuel. Let the heater cool down before refueling. Adding fuel to a hot heater can start a dangerous fire. To store your heater for the summer, remove all fuel from the tank.

Do not burn trash in the wood stove or fireplace. Burn only well-seasoned hardwoods. Be sure the fire you build fits your fireplace or stove, don't overload it. **Never add gasoline to a fire.** The gasoline fumes can flash and cause serious life-threatening burns. Be sure wood stoves are installed at least 36 inches away from the wall. Keep combustible materials well away from the fireplace, stove and chimney. Keep the area around them clean. Store stacked wood outdoors, away from the house. Always use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks or burning wood from leaving the fireplace and starting a fire. Place an approved pad under wood stoves to protect the floor from heat or hot coals which might drop. Never leave a fire unattended.

Creosote accumulation is the leading cause of chimney fires. A chimney that is dirty, blocked or is in disrepair can inhibit proper venting of smoke up the flue and can also cause a chimney fire. Nearly all residential fires originating in the chimney are preventable. An annual chimney inspection by a certified chimney sweep can prevent fire or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Keep wood stoves and fireplaces free of excess ash buildup. Excessive ash buildup prevents good circulation of air needed for combustion. When removing ashes, use a metal container with a tight-fitting cover. Always place ashes in an outside location away from structures. Ashes that seem cool may contain a smoldering charcoal that can start a fire.

Make and practice a home escape plan. Plan two ways out of each room and a designated meeting place.

For additional home heating fire safety tips visit the Washington State Patrol – Office of the State Fire Marshal web page at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/firemars.htm> or contact your local fire department.

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Home for the Holidays Candle Fires Peak on Christmas Day

Chief Ronal W. Serpas announced today that as the holidays approach, all Washington state residents should keep fire safety in mind and consider the safety of all guests.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, "Candle fires are more common around the holidays, because more people use candles and decorations are often near them. Candle fires peak on Christmas day—How does a little flame become so dangerous? Four out of ten times, the candles were left unattended, abandoned or inadequately controlled. One in four times, something that catches fire easily was left too close to the flame. Sometimes children play with the candle. Sometimes someone falls asleep with one or more candles lit. Four out of ten home candle fires start in the bedroom. The most common item first ignited by a candle is a mattress or bedding, except in December when decorations are the most common first item."

State Fire Marshal Mary Corso urges you to take extra precautions during the holiday season. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, and within every bedroom. Test your smoke alarms monthly, and replace batteries annually. This should be part of your home fire preparation and escape plan. Make sure your children and holiday guests know the sound of your smoke alarm by pressing the test button on the device.

Mary Corso cautions: "To keep your home safe, use care when burning candles."

The Office of the State Fire Marshal and the Washington State Association of Fire Marshals reminds you of the following tips:

Always keep a burning candle within sight.

- Use candles only in rooms where there is a responsible adult awake to control and oversee the flame. Extinguish all candles when leaving a room or before going to sleep. Do not use candles in sleeping areas.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire, such as clothing, books, papers, Christmas trees, decorations, window blinds and curtains.
- Keep candles away from high-traffic locations where they can be easily knocked over, including any area accessible to children or pets.

- Place candles on stable surfaces in sturdy holders that grip the candle securely and won't tip over.
- Place candles in candle holders that can't burn and are big enough to collect dripping wax.
- Extinguish taper and pillar candles when they burn to within two inches of the holder, and votive and container candles before the last half-inch of wax begins to melt. Avoid candles with combustible items embedded in them.
- Use extreme caution if you carry a lit candle, holding it well away from clothing and any combustibles that may be near the path along which you walk. Avoid loose, flowing clothing that is not flame-resistant. Never touch or move a votive or container candle when the wax is liquid.

Candles & children: Keep lit candles up high out of reach of children. Never leave a child unattended in a room with a candle. A child should not sleep in a room with a lit candle. Don't allow children or teens to have candles in their bedrooms. Store candles, matches and lighters up high and out of children's sight and reach, preferably in a locked cabinet.

During power outages: Flashlights and other battery-powered lights are much safer light sources than candles during a power failure. Try to avoid carrying a lit candle. Don't use a lit candle when searching for items in a confined space. Never use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment such as a kerosene heater or lantern. The flame may ignite the fumes.

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